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ABSTRACT

There are few bodies of research that can inform thinking about the education of young children with respect to gay-headed families. This 3-year ethnographic study used interviews with lesbian and gay parents of 3 to 7 year-olds, their children's teacher and the school administrator, and observations of the children to examine the relationship between gay parents and educators. Chapter 1 lays a foundation for understanding why homosexuality is perceived as a threat to the inherent goals of early childhood education and describes the research methods used. Chapter 2 examines children's experiences as a crucial aspect of how they come to understand families. Chapter 3 presents educators' viewpoints regarding their first experiences with people different from themselves, including gay-headed families. Chapter 4 uses dance as a metaphor for a communication process and traces the ways in which families become known to schools as lesbian or gay. Chapter 5 puts forth the idea that gender identity, roles, and sexual orientation are sharply different yet highly linked issues that require a frame of reference that moves across the entire life-span. This chapter considers classical theoretical foundations about gender development, and contrasts observations and ideas of educators and gay parents regarding gender-nonconformist play in young children. Chapter 6 explores factors affecting the curriculum and offers examples of the ways some teachers have thought about and constructed inclusive approaches with children. Chapter 7 makes arguments about changes needed in education from preschool through graduate education, in on-the-job training, and in professional development. Contains approximately 250 references. (KB)

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